

# LutheranWoman

October 2009

**TODAY**

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*Obedience*





# There's a little bit of Katie in all of us.

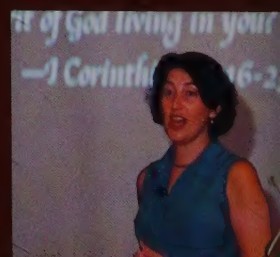
Katharina von Bora Luther was a practical and bold woman of faith. She was also the dedicated partner of her husband, Martin. The example she set as a wife and mother, farmer, entrepreneur, leader, and caregiver continues to inspire us today.

Through Katie's Fund, Women of the ELCA honors her life by developing leaders, bridging cultures, and nurturing faith.



*Katharina von Bora Luther*

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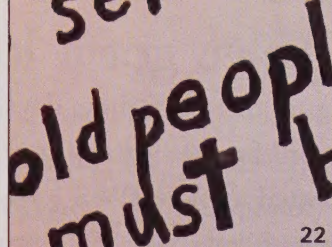




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## OBEDIENCE

VOLUME 22 NUMBER 8 OCTOBER 2009

Sometimes to obey means to live your life trusting that God will bring to pass what God has promised.

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VOICES

## Convenient Obedience

by Terri Lackey

### We've got a lot going

on in the office these days, trying to get more free resources for you edited and posted on our Web site. *LWT* Editor Kate Elliott has been helping out in that area and seemed a little stressed about all she needed to do. To help take the load off, I volunteered to write the editor's note this month. "What's the magazine theme again?" I asked. "*Obedience*," she said, smirking.

What did that smirk mean? Was she insinuating that I am disobedient?

I do tend to follow the beat of my own drummer, but if rules make sense to me, I'll obey them. Associate Editor Audrey Riley piped up, "You could write about your dogs." Well, I could, but they are neither obedient nor disobedient.

Kate said, "I was thinking of Bob."

Bob, my erudite, only-child, college-professor-turned-pastor husband, has very-definite-ideas-about-a-whole-lot-of-stuff. But I wouldn't call him disobedient. Passionate? Yes. Unruly? Often. But flat-out disobedient? No. Though not 100 percent obedient either.

Hey, like our dogs. And I suppose like a lot of Christians. Middle-grounders. We obey God when it's convenient.

Karris Golden finds herself in this predicament. In her article, "To Obey and To Love," she says she struggles with being an obedient Christian outside the walls of the church. "I believe the good I do outweighs the bad. Yet I also believe that 'good enough' seldom is. Obedience to God requires one thing: love, perhaps the most difficult task we face."

In our Bible study session this month we find that Paul believes faith and obedience go hand-in-hand. Using Abraham as example, Paul says that because Abraham trusted God, he obeyed God. Using Abraham as example, Paul believes that for Christians, faith or trust in God should proceed into our obedience.

Gwen Sayler writes in "Freed to Obey" that "membership in the Christian community is open to everyone who trusts that in Jesus Christ, God has acted to reconcile all creation."

Some of us, she says, still make "obedience a pre-qualification for faith," while others among us "see no connection" to faith and service.

However, she writes: "Paul's words are clear: The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ have changed everything. . . . God is at work in us and in our world, inviting us to trust and trustfully to act."

Trusting, then acting: That reminds me of Women of the ELCA groups that are known for their service to others. These women make quilts for people in need, assemble health kits, school kits, and flood buckets. They knit hats, make home-cooked dinners, hold fundraisers, and lead Bible studies. On page 34, we share photos of a few of those obedient groups with you.

May we all become more like these faithful women, moving beyond our Christian comfort zones and into a place where our trust in God's promises translates into unequivocal obedience. 🌸

**Terri Lackey** is managing editor of *Lutheran Woman Today*.





GIVE US THIS DAY

## Mama Crucifer Blues

by Terri Speirs

### True story.

It is five minutes before the service and my daughter is hiding from my husband-the-pastor. Why? Because she does not want to be pressed into service as an acolyte. Sometimes in a pinch, the pastor's family is called upon for duty. Serving as an acolyte is a beautiful thing, and these days in our congregation families often do it together.

Ring. Ring. There's my cell phone. My husband-the-pastor is calling from the other end of the church.

Husband-the-pastor: We need a crucifer. Can you do it?

Me: I did it last week. People will think I'm the only crucifer.

Husband-the-pastor: That's okay, we need somebody.

Me (since I can't say no): Okay, sure.

Which means that our kids will be unsupervised during church, and at ages 9 and 12, they need supervision.

My parting words to the children before running (in heels) to the sacristy: You two had better behave.

Breathless from running, I slip on the white hooded alb. I run again to the main sanctuary entrance, take up the cross, and do what crucifers do. It entails carrying the cross up the aisle during the first hymn and then sitting up front in one of those throne-like chairs in the chancel during the entire service. As a crucifer, I am sure I look very religious.

The hymn is about forgiveness.

The boy is at the chancel doorway waving to me. He whispers big: "Mom, where's my Spiderman?" I shoo him away.

The readings are about forgiveness.

The boy bounces through the chancel doorway, crossing behind my husband-the-pastor, eager to show me something. It is his drawing of a killer butterfly. "Shhhhhh," I say.

The sermon is about forgiveness.

The boy departs; the girl appears in the doorway. She whispers big: "Mom, brother is eating ice cream sandwiches." I shush her.

The prayers are about forgiveness.

The boy reappears with chocolate on his white sweater. He wants to sit with me.

It is all about forgiveness.

The girl finds a cozy pew in which to read her best vampire book. The boy crawls behind the pulpit. Mama crucifer glares at him with the sternest killer butterfly eyes she can muster.

Is injustice seriously forgivable?

I heard about a woman in Rwanda who forgave the person who murdered her entire family in the 1994 genocide. I cannot figure this out. I may look religious, but I do not get forgiveness. The one thing I do know is that the people in my congregation are an amazing bunch of folks for whom I am grateful.

At the end of the service, mama crucifer takes up the cross, walks back down the center aisle, and goes out into the world. The whole congregation follows.

We go to pancake brunch. My son is not hungry. Answers are nonsensical. I still have questions. ☸

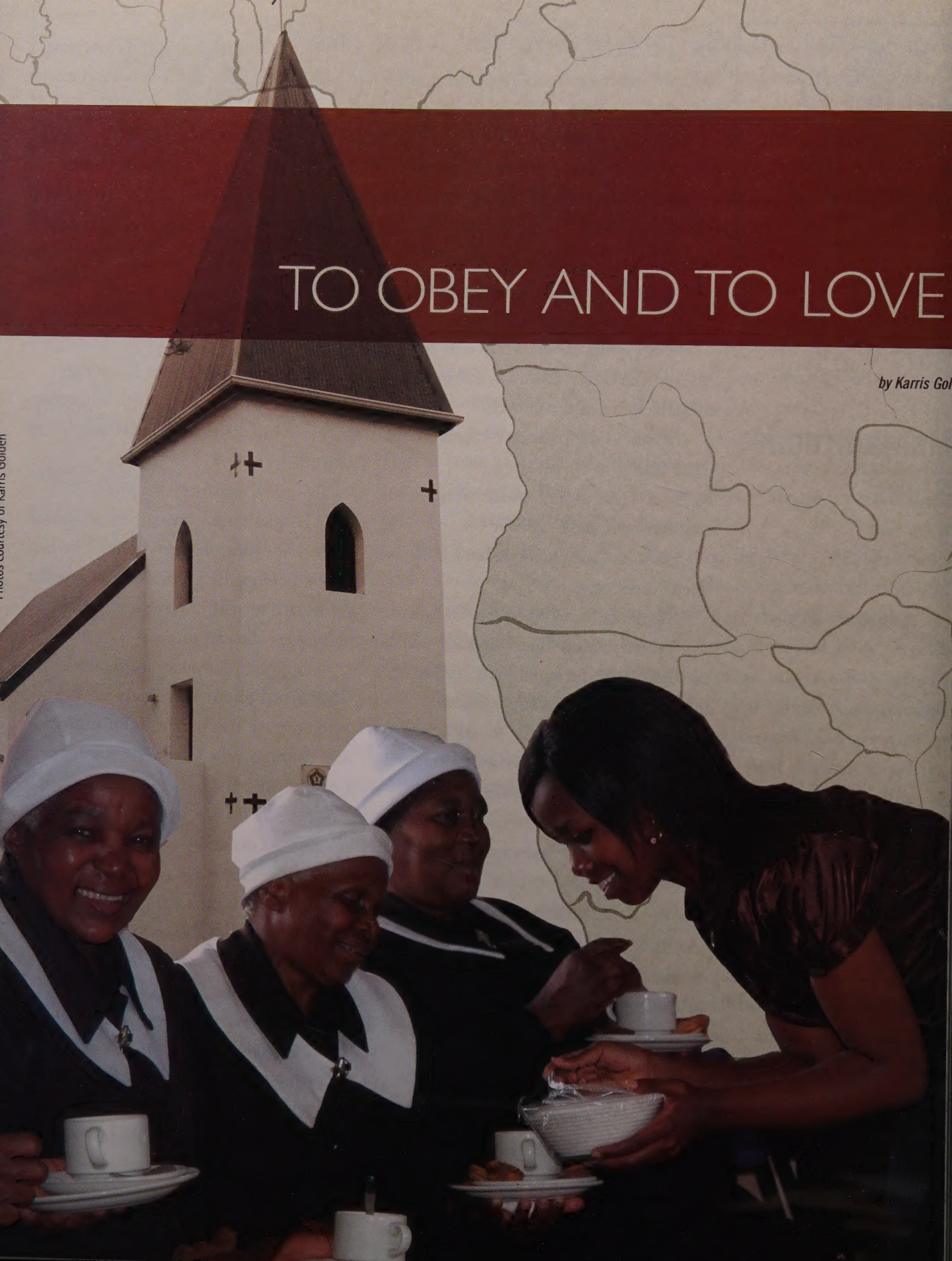
**Terri Mork Speirs** and her family are members of St. John's Lutheran Church in Des Moines, Iowa.



# TO OBEY AND TO LOVE

by Karris Golden

Photos courtesy of Karris Golden





*Our African sisters lead rich, fulfilling lives and do not dwell on what material items they lack. They celebrate the joy of loving faithfulness to the gospel.*



I enjoy worship in my church's spacious sanctuary. It is a sacred place, perfectly suited to nurturing and restoring faith because it points toward contemplation and praise. Even the snaps, cracks, and creaks of pews and floorboards sound musical to me.

During worship in this contemplative environment, I often feel the desire to be a more obedient Christian. I make mental promises: I will try harder and do better. But when I leave the comfort of the church on Sunday, there is little that reminds me of those promises Monday through Saturday.

The world outside the sanctuary makes me realize that obedience to my faith must come from me, not from a place. I'm not being hard on myself. I believe the good I do outweighs the bad. Yet I also believe that "good enough" seldom is. Obedience to God requires one thing: love, perhaps the most difficult task we face.

We know Christ told us to love. But do we really understand what Jesus meant when he said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second [commandment] is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:30-31)?

That commandment is uncompromising. Jesus didn't say, "Love the people you get along with. Love the people who make you feel comfortable. Love those who look and talk like you. You don't have to love the ones who don't look and talk like you, but you do have to tolerate them. You have to give stuff to the people who don't have as much as you, but it's okay to keep them at arm's length."

I know Jesus wouldn't say that, but sometimes I falter. Obedience often seems unattainable. I have

received the gift of grace—unworthy as I am—and Christ has made clear his expectations for those who seek to follow him.

## GOD FIRST LOVED US

Shame, embarrassment, rejection—these are the feelings that keep me from loving others the way Jesus commands. To remind myself, I often think about a song I learned when I was very young. The only words are, "We love, because God first loved us."

The words "we love" are repeated three times. As a child, I joyfully shouted out the song. As an adult, I wonder if the song's composer repeated "we love" because it's human nature to forget the tenets of our faith: To believe is to obey; to obey is to love; to love is to serve.

It seems easy enough in the abstract. But when I face my neighbor, known or unknown, love becomes complicated. I want to obey and to love others—if God



will just let *me* decide what it means to love fully and openly. Through prejudgments, rationalizations, and qualifications, I will usually try to redefine the conditions of the unconditional love.

I don't want to be this way. I want to be more like Jesus. But I am quick to excuse my own transgressions, telling myself that I am only human. But would Jesus accept my excuses? Would he tell me, "It's okay that you did not show that person love; she was closed off to you, and you're only human"? In my heart, I know the answer.

## LEARNING FROM GLOBAL SISTERS

In November 2008, I participated in a Women of the ELCA and ELCA Global Mission study seminar that traveled throughout rural and urban areas in South Africa. Before and during the seminar, we studied, attended lectures, and had in-depth discussions. We focused on common issues that affect young women around the world: poverty, racism, inequality, educational disparities, and the HIV and AIDS pandemic.

This study seminar drew together nine young women from across the United States and 12 from the sub-Saharan African countries of Malawi, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Botswana, South Africa, and Zambia. We visited churches, seminars, schools, museums, governmen-

tal agencies, and nonprofit organizations. We were challenged, engaged, and transformed.

By chance, I attended only Zulu-language worship services while I was in South Africa. I do not speak the language, but I learned valuable lessons anyway. Chief among these was that North American Lutherans have much more to learn from African Lutherans than we have to teach or give them.

This was hard for me to take in. We in the United States tend to pity Africans because of what we perceive as their lack of material comforts. We do not always realize that we meet these sisters as equals in terms of abilities, intelligence, and personal resources. We have it in our minds that we can help them; it doesn't occur to us that they can help us, too.

When I went into those South African churches, I realized how arrogant and sinful it is to pity those who have less money, status, or sociopolitical power. Pity is not love or respect. Our African sisters lead rich, fulfilling lives and do not dwell on what material items they lack. They celebrate the joy of loving faithfulness to the gospel.

## WELCOMING STRANGERS

At the South African churches we visited, most members took active roles in congregational leadership. Worship is important to them not

because of centuries of tradition, but because of their understanding of the faith. I admit that that is not always my own motivation when I make my way to church.

Members of these churches traveled to worship—usually, on foot—through rough conditions. Many took turns directing some part of the service, joining other members in leading Scripture, prayer, or music.

A significant part of these services was devoted to welcoming strangers. We visitors were expected to introduce ourselves and share something about ourselves. It did not matter that we spoke only English and that we did not look or live like them. They were elated to greet us and other visitors, putting me in mind of Hebrews 13:2: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some people have entertained angels without knowing it."

To obey the commandment to love one another is to push ourselves to do something extraordinary. In South Africa, I met women from the United States and sub-Saharan Africa who do this. They live their faith. They don't put it on hold until certain criteria are met and the proper forms are filled out. They live a faith that calls them to account, and they actively work to keep those accounts current. They understand the meaning behind those stories about Jesus. As



continue in my journey, I strive to be more like those women.

## TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER

Sometimes I rationalize my missteps by putting myself outside the biblical world of the Gospels. Those stories take place in a context different from my own, when the known world was relatively small and sparsely populated. My world is big and crowded. It can be dangerous, divided, and hyper-political. The neighbor we are called to love may not know Christ or be much like us. We wonder how to fight problems like poverty, war, disease, discrimination, and other forms of inequality. Where do we begin? Perhaps we believe there isn't anything we *can* do, that the world will always be this way.

But it will not be; we cannot let it. The gospel of Jesus Christ is constant and true and it has never been more urgently needed. Our faith guides us to reach out to the stranger in the midst of a disaster, stand up to injustice that we think is none of our business, and fix problems that others think can wait.

To be faithful is to be obedient. To be obedient is to try even when we know we might fail. To be obedient is to keep trying.

Perhaps it was easier for Jesus' contemporaries to be obedient. Jesus was right there. The disciples walked, talked, ate, and lived with him. They

believed, with the added benefit of actually *seeing* him. They watched Jesus perform miracles, talk with those whom society had cast off, and reject social and religious conventions. To be with him, to walk with him, must have been amazing.

If that's true, then why do the Gospels sometimes read like a running account of "Jesus vs. the Apostles"? Why did even Jesus' inner circle have such a hard time letting go? Why did they argue with him? Why would they want to?

Today I hear the New Testament stories and shake my head as Thomas doubts, Peter denies, and the rest try to contradict Jesus' commands at one time or another. I realize I am no different.

They were like *us*, not like him. And like us, they were trying to be better. In spite of our failings, Jesus loves us completely and unconditionally. He sets an example. Realistically, we know that we cannot always be like him, but we must try.

To obey, we must fight our inclinations to believe we know better. We must cherish the Good News as a powerful message, not as mere words from long ago. We must obey its call to love one another as Jesus taught us. 🌿

**Karris Golden** is a member of Trinity American Lutheran Church in Waterloo, Iowa. She is a regular contributor to *Lutheran Woman Today*, *Café: Stirring the Spirit Within*, and *The Lutheran* magazine.



## Global Education

The seminar Karris attended is part of the Women of the ELCA Global Education program, Women Building Global Community. This program in partnership with ELCA Global Mission brings together young women ages 21 to 35 from ELCA companion synods with women in their companion church relationships. The 2008 study seminar to South Africa was the third study seminar in this second trip around the world. The program also supports more than 200 global advocates who have traveled to their companion church in sharing what they have learned with others. For more information write or call Valora Starr (above, right) director for discipleship, at 800-638-3522, ext. 2741, or e-mail [valora.starr@elca.org](mailto:valora.starr@elca.org).





## CALENDAR NOTES

# October

compiled by Audrey Novak Riley  
from sources including Evangelical  
Lutheran Worship (ELW), Sundays  
and Seasons, and the Lutheran  
Study Bible, published by  
Augsburg Fortress, Publishers  
([www.augsburgfortress.org](http://www.augsburgfortress.org))

This month, each Sunday's epistle is taken from the letter to the Hebrews. An old tradition has it that Paul was the author of this elegantly written letter, but scholars have disagreed on that for centuries. Martin Luther thought the author might have been Apollos (see Acts 18:24 for more about him). Some scholars suggest that the letter was written in Rome to Christians elsewhere; others persuasively argue that it was written elsewhere to Christians in Rome. In any case, the addressees must have been deeply familiar with the Jewish scriptures and religious life. The purpose of the letter, written sometime between about the years 60 and 90, is to encourage the community, who had suffered persecution, to persevere in the faith.

### 4 18th Sunday after Pentecost

In today's passage from Hebrews, the writer opens with something that appears again and again in this letter: God did something good in the past (in this instance, speaking to the people through prophets) and now God has done something even better (speaking through the Son). Notice how the epistle quotes today's psalm as well. Today's readings are Genesis 2:18-24; Psalm 8; Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12; Mark 10:2-16.

### 4 Francis of Assisi, renewer of the church

Many of us know the prayer that begins "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace," attributed to Francis. He didn't just say the words, he did his best to act on them. In 1219, while Crusaders bat-

tled Muslims all over the Holy Land, he traveled to Egypt to meet Sultan Malik al-Kamil, leader of the Muslim forces, and persuade him to the peace of Christmas. The sultan was impressed with Francis' sincerity. He listened politely to Francis' offer of gifts (at least one of which is still exhibited in Assisi), and gave him a safe passage back to the Crusaders' camp. Francis' attempt at peacemaking didn't stop the battle, but his model of respectful nonviolent dialogue is one we can all follow. He died on this date in 1226.

### 11 19th Sunday after Pentecost

As the *Lutheran Study Bible* points out, today's epistle gives us both law and gospel: God's judgment and God's promise. And God's promise means we can approach the throne of grace with boldness—thanks be to God! The texts appointed for today are Amos 5:6-7, 10-15; Psalm 90:12-17; Hebrews 4:12-16; Mark 10:17-31.

### 15 Teresa of Avila, renewer of the church

When this young Spanish woman entered the convent, she learned mental prayer, that is, keeping Christ present in her imagination. She found this way of prayer difficult, but kept at it for years. After a severe illness, she began having vivid mystical experiences of God's presence. Nourished by her transformed life of prayer, she reformed her Carmelite order of sisters and saw it flourish. In the meantime, she wrote several books on prayer that are still in print. Teresa died on this date in 1582.



### 20th Sunday after Pentecost

In today's passage from Hebrews, the writer presents Christ as a great high priest. What's that about? In ancient Jewish practice, every year at Yom Kippur, the high priest would solemnly enter the Holy of Holies in the Temple (the only time anyone ever entered it) to make atonement for all the people. The reference to Melchizedek is from Psalm 110; the writer draws on the figure of this ancient king and priest (see Genesis 14:18–20) as a symbolic forerunner of Christ's even greater role as king and priest. The texts appointed for today are Isaiah 33:4–12; Psalm 91:9–16; Hebrews 1:1–10; Mark 10:35–45.

### 21st Sunday after Pentecost

Paul calls the writer of the third Gospel and the book of Acts "the beloved physician" in Colossians 4:14. Luke accompanied Paul on some of his travels and according to 2 Timothy, attended Paul in his last imprisonment. Many congregations hold healing services this month in honor of Luke's day; see "Wholeness and Peace," beginning on page 16, for more about the church's healing ministries. The texts appointed for Luke's festival are Isaiah 43:8–13 or Isaiah 35:5–8; Psalm 124, 2 Timothy 4:5–11; and Luke 1:1–4, 24:44–53.

### 22nd Sunday after Pentecost

This prominent leader of the early church in Jerusalem was martyred in about the year 62. He was a close relative (possibly brother or cousin; the Aramaic word is the same) of Jesus and came to faith in him after the resurrection. Paul had several encounters with him, described in Acts and in Paul's letters. The biblical letter that bears his name may or may not have come from his hand, but scholars agree that it surely carries some of his ideas.

### 23rd Sunday after Pentecost

Will your congregation sing Martin Luther's great hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" today? Luther paraphrased the psalm appointed for today in his hymn. Scholars aren't quite sure when Luther wrote this text but it was sometime before 1527 or 1528, the date of the earliest known printed version. The texts appointed for Reformation Sunday are Jeremiah 31:31–34; Psalm 46; Romans 3:19–28; John 8:31–36.

### 24th Sunday after Pentecost

Most congregations will observe Reformation Sunday today, but you might also read the texts appointed for the 21st Sunday after Pentecost for your devotions. The writer of Hebrews elaborates on Christ's place as eternal high priest, exalted above the heavens. The texts appointed for Sunday are Jer-

emiah 31:7–9; Psalm 126; Hebrews 7:23–28; Mark 10:46–52.

### 25th Sunday after Pentecost

We know very little about these two apostles: Simon is only named in lists, and today's Gospel gives us the only words we have from Jude's lips. In any case, these two apostles were close to Jesus. The texts appointed for their commemoration are Jeremiah 26:1–6, 7–16; Psalm 11; 1 John 4:1–6; John 14:21–27.

### 26th Sunday after Pentecost

On this date in 1517, the monk Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, where he was a professor in the university. See Joy Schroeder's article from November 2007, "All Saints Day 1517," for more about what happened that day. It is posted on our Web site, [www.lutheranwomantoday.org](http://www.lutheranwomantoday.org). Click on the "Featured articles" tab, the "Back issues." At the bottom of the page see the "Archive file" link, then November 2007.

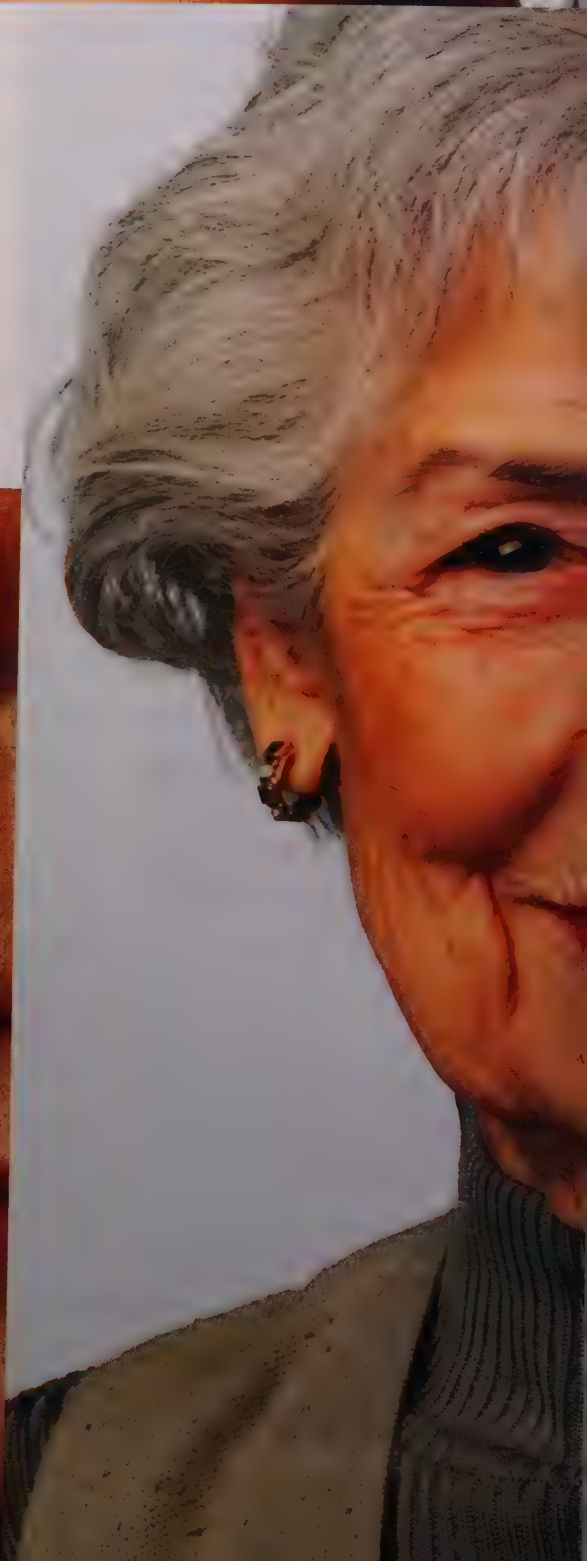






# Miraculous and One

*by Catherine Malotky*







*Time for true confessions.* When I was about 12, I sent a letter to Ann Landers desperate for advice, unable to ask my loving mother or wise father. I required anonymity because I was both terrified and thoroughly ashamed.

I was facing the mandatory get-to-seventh-grade physical. The appointment was set and I was tapped. I knew I would need to be probed before my doctor, who had never done anything to create such dread. How would I survive this?

At age 12, I did not love my body. It came along with me like troublesome baggage I could not

trade away or change. At that time, there were no sports programs to help me and my girlfriends celebrate the capacities of our bodies. There were no school programs to help us learn to push our physical limits or team up with others to accomplish a goal—or how to lose (or win) gracefully. I did not live in my skin.

I was 12 years old, and in my perspective, grotesquely behind in my adolescent development—too tall, too flat, too loud, and too smart for my own good. I wish I could say that I've grown well beyond those days. In some ways, I have. In others, not so much.

How did this happen? Studies indicate that I was not alone 40



years ago. Girls struggled then to see their bodies as gifts. Still today, the wonder of our female flesh is too often overwhelmed by the steady force-feeding of distorted and unachievable images of what girls and women should look and act like. Girls still have precarious relationships with their bodies, and far too many of them pay too high a price to feel better about themselves.

## *A relationship*

But it's not just young girls who struggle with what it means to live in their flesh and be able to rejoice in it. How about you? What's your relationship with your body? Good friend? Begrudging caretaker? Camouflage virtuoso? Gracious encourager? Design artist? Loving defender? Awed admirer?

Are you always going to lose 20 pounds? Do you tend to your aches and pains rather than deny them? Do you use your body to the extent you can, offering it an opportunity for wellness, resilience, and strength? Do you feed it well? Rest it enough? Pamper it just a bit?

Step back for a moment and think about this relationship you have. Your body has been around as long as you have. In fact, you probably wouldn't be the person you are without the body you have. In fact, your body and soul are inextricably entwined.

There is a strain of faith that considers the body the lesser of the two. The body, after all, gets sick, it hurts, and one day, it will die. An outside observer can see that there's something wrong in the body. But the truth is that what's on the inside, though not as obvious as what's on the outside, can be sick, hurt, and die right along with the outside, or even, in some cases, before.

## *A package deal*

In the Genesis creation stories, we do not read of yet another act of creation reserved for the soul. God created human beings, body and soul, the package deal. In the first story, human beings were the last thing to be created before God rested on the seventh day. With a word, they were called into being.

In the second story, God fashioned the human being from humus, breathing into those first nostrils the breath of life so that the human being became the one God had designed. This intimacy, this fashioning of the human from the earth that would be humanity's home, is all about the flesh—a little dip here, a little paunch there, a vascular system, an endocrine system, hair in all the right places, and a grin.

Now think of your body from this point of view. If your flesh is God's intention, if it is as it is on purpose (not just anyone's

purpose, mind you, but God's) then it is God's first covenant with you. When you emerged squalling or wide-eyed from your mother's womb, you were whole, one thing: *you*, and none other than you. Your *you*, inside and out, is God's covenant with you, primal and primary.

It is true that you received two sets of DNA that, combined, lean in the direction of left- or right-handedness, dark or light hair, blueish or brownish eyes, tall or short, wiry or solid, male or female, gross-motor inclined or fine-motor, introverted or extroverted . . . the list goes on. We could claim that these things are an accident, a function of natural selection, and a bit of genetic luck when those first strands of chromosomes started winding together.

Or, from the vantage point of faith, we can see God's hand at work, shaping the miracle that is *you*. You are a product of God's imagination, as are all of us, and each of us. Such an infinite variety. Look beyond the media images. See the real women in your life, each one a wonder, each one unique, each one created by God.

## *God's handiwork*

Our similarities are also miracles. I have been told that I sound like my mother, that I gesture like my sisters, that my daughters' speech cadences are like mine. My father's





*Look beyond the media images. See the real women in your life, each one a wonder, each one unique, each one created by God.*

mother was an editor and a spelling whiz. My mother's mother was soft and warm. Her smile drew me to her safe embrace. I can see these things in me, manifesting my grandmother's gifts in my own self.

Of course, the shortcomings of my gene pool are also apparent. We have trick shoulders, a tendency toward arthritis and strokes. Menstrual cramps seem to run in the family (sorry, daughters!), along with impatience. Some of us have troubles with numbers, though words seldom stop us. We can be on the heavy side, and can be a little too helpful.

Gene pool or God's handiwork? What about both? Because what kind of miracle is a gene pool? Let's get a little awestruck about all that, while we're at it. What kind of divine imagination made up a gene pool? And how it works its way out in a life?

And speaking of gene pools, what about the whole conception and birth thing? Most of us have had the birds and the bees talk, but really now—isn't that all amazing? Sperm and egg and cervix and fallopian tubes and implantation and pregnancy? What a miracle!

How could we ever in a million years come to think of our bodies as *less than*? As not a part of ourselves? Just because our bodies don't look like Barbie's?

## *Gathered whole*

We need to do a little cultural reality therapy here. Once we have a few decades under our belts, our bodies are going to tell that story.

Our hands will have nicks and scars, our laugh lines will start settling in for the long haul, and the weight of caring for those we love will take its toll. Why would we think or expect otherwise?

When we have a whole lifetime of experiences behind us, and our bodies have weathered them all, and we begin to manage our infirmities rather than trying to get rid of them, shouldn't we count our wisdom as success and rejoice in it? Of course these things can be frustrating, too, but why do we not cherish the slowing down?

Why would we think or expect that an 80-year-old woman could have the same beauty as a 20-year-old woman?

And finally, when we are old, and we know how interconnected our bodies and souls are, when our reach is about living each day, loving, praying, and remembering, then we come back to the place we were when we first emerged from our mother's womb.

You will be one, then, filled with the breath of God, each inhalation a miracle, and each exhalation a blessing, until finally you breathe your last. It is then that the promises made to you at your baptism will be fulfilled and you will enter into God's domain, beyond the limits of time and space that have bound you.

With all the saints who have gone before and with all the saints who will follow, you will be gathered, whole, into God's eternal breath of life. ☙

**The Rev. Catherine Malotky** serves the ELCA Board of Pensions as retirement planning manager. An ordained pastor, she has also been an editor, teacher, parish pastor, and retreat leader. She writes the "Amen!" column for *LWT*.







*"O Christ, the healer, we have come to pray for health, to plead for friends. How can we fail to be restored when reached by love that never ends? From every ailment flesh endures our bodies clamor to be freed; Yet in our hearts we would confess that wholeness is our deepest need."*

*(Evangelical Lutheran Worship 610, vv. 1, 2).*

# Wholeness and *peace*

*by Kathie Bender Schwich*

Throughout the ELCA, St. Luke's Sunday in October is often the occasion for healing services. In addition, many congregations offer healing services as a regular part of their healing ministry throughout the year. With the words, "In the name of our Savior Jesus Christ, be strengthened and filled with God's grace, that you may know the healing power of the Spirit," Christ's people receive the laying on of hands, anointing with oil, and the intercessions of others through the church's ministry of healing.

The introduction to the Healing Service in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (ELW) states: "This ministry is offered, not as a replacement for the gifts of God that come through the scientific community, nor as the promise of a cure. Rather, the church's healing ministry is an offering and celebration of the gifts of God's strength and comfort in times of suffering, God's promise of

wholeness and peace for all people, and God's love embodied in the community of faith."

That may at first read like a disclaimer. This healing service does not claim to replace the care provided by your physician and it does not guarantee a cure for what is ailing you. So what does it offer? Much more. The healing ministry that the church offers in Christ's name provides us with comfort and strength when we are suffering, a reminder that God promises us wholeness and peace regardless of our physical condition, and tangible evidence of the love of brothers and sisters around us during troubling times. It also opens to us the vast network of healing resources that are there for us in times of need.

The congregation to which I belong offers healing services on a regular basis. As worshipers come forward to receive forgiveness and renewal through the sacrament of

Holy Communion, they are also offered prayer, laying on of hands, and anointing for healing. Throughout the years, more and more people have come forward for this rite as they have come to realize the many parts of their lives and their world that are in need of healing and the many forms that healing can take.

Often when we think of healing, we think of the healing of our physical bodies: the curing of illness or the mending of broken bones or surgical incisions. But the healing that people seek can be as varied as the individuals themselves. While some seek relief from the illness that wracks their body or the body of a loved one, others come seeking release from the addiction that has taken hold of their life, the healing of a broken relationship, or freedom from the sorrow that comes from acknowledging that they are participants in the ills that burden



our world. People come for varied forms of healing but all come longing for wholeness.

### *To be restored*

The hospital in which I serve was founded by Norwegian Lutheran deaconesses and nurtured over the years by faithful leaders who held a vision of promoting healing and providing care that encompasses physical, emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual needs. This hospital values the rich resources that the patient's personal faith and faith community can provide in concert with the practice of medicine.

Certainly the primary reason most people come to the hospital is to seek physical healing. But at any given time, spiritual concerns are also being addressed as prayers for healing can be heard in waiting rooms where families await the word of a loved one's surgery, in the newborn intensive care unit as families and staff members pray that the delicate new lives before them will thrive, and at bedsides in the oncology unit as patients and their families seek healing of soul and spirit in those for whom death draws near.

Sometimes the healing they seek doesn't come in the way they hope it will. There is a beautiful wooden altar in our hospital's chapel. Engraved all around the edge of the circular altar are these words

from Psalm 103: "Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases."

One day a chaplain walked into the chapel and encountered a distraught and angry young man whose critically ill baby had died. With jaw clenched and tears streaming down his face, the young father pointed to the inscription on the altar and exclaimed, "That is an outright lie. If Jesus heals all our diseases, then why did my baby die? Why was I praying all this time for a miracle to happen when I was being ignored?"

### *We also experience healing when we hear God's promises of peace and wholeness.*

Throughout Scripture, we read about Jesus healing those who come to him in faith. Yet each of us has experienced times when we prayed for healing that did not come in the way we had hoped it would. Does that mean that God was ignoring us? Author Ron DelBene in *Near Life's End* (The Upper Room, 1988) writes, "I do not think we can ever say prayer is wasted. Although prayer may not change a situation and give us the miracle we want, prayer changes us. Through prayer,

we become more aware of God's presence. Through prayer, we find inner resources and strength we didn't know we had. Through prayer, we are no longer facing our fears and pain alone; God is beside us renewing our spirit, restoring our soul, and helping us carry the burden when it becomes too heavy for us to bear alone."

Several months later, that man and his wife returned to the hospital chapel to attend a memorial service for their baby and other children who had died that year. At that service he was able to speak of the healing in his life since his baby's death: healing that came from his renewed awareness that God loves him and is walking with him through his pain, that God is shedding tears right along with him, and that God continues to offer strength and comfort to get him through the days ahead.

The prayers that we offer and are offered for us in our time of need remind us of God's ongoing presence and healing power in our lives. In the midst of physical illness, whatever the outcome, we experience healing in the knowledge that God's comfort and strength are sustaining us.

### *On a journey together*

You and I also experience the Spirit's healing power through God's love embodied by the community



of faith around us. The dedication of caring people who walk with us on our faith journey, especially during difficult times, is a tangible reminder to us that we are not alone in our pain and anguish.

As the pastor's hands are laid on our head in the healing service, we are once again reminded of the support of God's love and the love of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

When I was a parish pastor, I witnessed the ministry of faithful Stephen ministers, trained lay caregivers who are there in times of confusion and loneliness to listen, to care, to offer support and encouragement, and to be Christ to another in their time of distress. Now as a member of a hospital staff, I daily witness the spiritual healing that comes about as patient and chaplain journey together through prayer, through reading of Scripture, and through sharing faith stories, sorrows, and struggles.

Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D., writes, "People have been healing each other since the beginning. Long before there were surgeons, psychologists, oncologists, and internists, we were there for each other. The healing of our present woundedness may lie in recognizing and reclaiming the capacity we all have to heal each other, the enormous power in the simplest of human relationships; the strength of a touch, the blessing of forgiveness, the grace of some-

one else taking you just as you are and finding in you an unsuspected goodness" (*Kitchen Table Wisdom*, p. 217, Riverhead Books, 1996).

### *Marked with the cross*

We also experience healing when we hear God's promises of peace and wholeness. As the oil is placed on our forehead at the healing service, we are reminded that God has promised peace and wholeness to you and me through the death and resurrection of God's son, Jesus. Even when our physical ailments cannot be cured, we are assured that we will be returned to wholeness and lasting peace.

We are marked with the cross of Christ forever. That is healing news! God also has promised peace and wholeness to all people.

You and I experience healing when we confess our complicity in the brokenness and dis-ease of others and seek to bring healing into their lives through our prayers and our acts of justice and healing.

"In conflicts that destroy our health we recognize the world's disease, Our common life declares our ills. Is there no cure, O Christ, for these? Grant that we all, made one in faith, in your community may find, The wholeness that, enriching us, shall reach the whole of humankind" (*ELW* 610, vv. 3, 4).

In the Affirmation of Baptism service, you and I promised to

"serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth."

Through the ministries of congregations, synods, institutions, and agencies throughout this church we are doing just that.

You and I experience healing in our own lives as we get involved and work with these brothers and sisters in Christ to bring healing, justice, and wholeness to our communities and throughout the world. We are blessed to be part of a larger church that embodies God's promises of peace and wholeness, not only in its healing liturgies, but also through all that it does each day.

When we pray for healing in the name of Christ, the great healer and reconciler of the world, we entrust to God ourselves and all who are in need of healing, confident that through God's promises of peace and wholeness, God's comforting presence and empowering strength, and God's embodied love, all will be made whole.

Empowered by God's strength and confident of our own healing, we are blessed to be participants in the healing of the world. 🌿

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# THE BREAD WE SHARE

This year, October 4 is the day we celebrate our communion with other Lutheran churches all over the world. Through the Lutheran World Federation, the ELCA is in communion with 140 member churches in 79 countries, representing 68.5 million Lutherans. October 4 is also celebrated as World Communion Sunday. Through the communion, we give and receive gifts, witness, and expertise among our brothers and sisters in all the many expressions of our work together.

We also look forward to LWF's 11th Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany, July 20–27, 2010, whose theme “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread” calls us to reflect on food security. The petition “give us today our daily bread” is both our prayer and our recognition of God's invitation to us to celebrate God's abundant gifts—and to fight whatever threatens the gift of life and is manifested in hunger and poverty, oppression and injustice.

The words of an Argentinian offertory song “Bendice, Señor Nuestra Pan” capture this invitation for all of us:

Now bless, Lord, the bread  
you have given  
And give bread to this our  
world that is hungry;  
To those with bread give hunger

for true justice now!  
And bless, Lord, the bread  
that we share.

We believe that “mission encompasses proclamation, service, and advocacy for justice.” Beyond sharing resources, we continue to embody what it means to share the God-given relationship of a communion. We do not only share bread with one another, both at the table of Jesus Christ and our home tables, but through the Triune God's gift of relationship, we receive and live out what it means to be life-giving bread to one another.

## Ideas for celebrating LWF Sunday

- Learn and/or include an offertory song from Argentina in your worship liturgy: “Bendice, Señor, Nuestra Pan” (*Agape: Songs of Hope and Reconciliation*, the LWF hymnbook, #9).
- Have an adult forum or discussion lifting up our active response, both in words and actions, as a global communion using the LWF's 2008 Council Resolution on food security. See the LWF Web site for more.
- Use *Food for Life: Recipes and Stories on the Right to Food* (available from Augsburg Fortress by calling 800-328-4648) as a resource to learn more about particular communi-

ties. Host a potluck using recipes from the cookbook. Get to know this community deeper—go beyond the varieties of food they share and meet women from this culture. A resource describing ways to use this book will be available on the LWF North America Web site.

- Read how to conduct a worship service that lifts up the theme of the day using various ingredients of making bread on the Web site.
- Gather reflections from members of your circle or congregation on the theme “Give Us Today Our Daily Bread.” What does this petition mean for our daily life and faith? Discuss this and reflect on Martin Luther's Small Catechism definition of this petition. (The Small Catechism is included in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, page 1160.)
- View on the Web site the *Lutheran World Information* special issue for LWF Sunday. It will describe how Lutheran churches in the world act on this theme. 🌿

The Rev. Teresita Valeriano is the regional officer for the Lutheran World Federation in North America.

These resources and much more are available at [www.lutheranworld.org](http://www.lutheranworld.org) and [www.elca.org/lwf](http://www.elca.org/lwf).





LET US PRAY

## Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver!

by Julie K. Ageson

### Perhaps you will recall

reading here last month about the spring floods that threatened communities in the Upper Midwest. Memories of past floods added to the sense of nature out of control and humankind at its mercy. For my community in Minnesota, the siege began in the ice and snow of a bitter winter and finally ended when grass had turned green and flowers and trees once again graced the landscape. The floods came and the floods went and it took a toll.

You may remember other challenges of the last year: an illness that has shaken your world, the death of someone you love, the loss of a job or changes in your work that you didn't see coming, financial worries, a broken relationship. Perhaps, like me, you agonize over the church as we struggle to live into a new century. It may be your own congregation that hiccups along in frustrating ways. It may be the larger church wending its way through uncharted waters, trying to find new ways to speak God's grace and hope in the 21st century.

Maybe you worry about your children or the economy or aging parents or the myriad challenges that are our common lot as human beings.

My shoulders get tired carrying these things. Now in the midst of fall activities and the resuming of busy schedules, many of us are overwhelmed by too many commitments, too much busy-ness, too little time for reflection, silence, prayer, sitting quietly with one another, with ourselves, with God. Perhaps others among us have

too much time, trying to adjust to retirement or another stage of life that presents new challenges and dilemmas.


The promises found in this month's study of Romans 4 are mind-boggling—the assurance that obedience means living life trusting that God will bring to pass what God has promised. This God who gives life to the dead reminds us yet again that whatever the worry, whatever the reason we wake in the deep of night, God is there.

May this gracious God grant us peace to believe—even in the darkness of the night—that God will bring to pass what God has promised.

Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker,  
Pain-bearer, Life-giver, Source of all that is and that shall be, Father and mother of us all, Loving God, in whom is heaven:

The hallowing of your name echo through the universe! The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world! Your heavenly will be done by all created beings! Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth.

With the bread we need for today, feed us. In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us. In times of temptation and test, strengthen us. From trials too great to endure, spare us. From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and for ever. Amen.\* 

**Julie K. Ageson** is coordinator of ELCA Resource Centers and director of the Resource Center for the Eastern North Dakota Synod. She is a member of Bethesda Lutheran Church in Moorhead, Minn.

This alternative version of the Lord's prayer is from *A New Zealand Prayer Book*, Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand, and Polynesia, 1989.



★ free help ★  
This service is  
for old people only.  
you must be at  
least 40 years  
★ old to qualify. ★



# Freed to OBEY

Gwen Saylor

It was the year we were in fourth grade. Sincere to the very core, my friend Phyllis and I wanted to put our Lutheran and Roman Catholic faiths into practice by serving those in need. Discerning that the elderly in our town could use assistance with chores like raking and carrying groceries, we made a brightly colored poster offering our free services to help them.

Since we assumed that absolutely everyone would want to take advantage of our generous offer, we added a qualification—"This service for old people only; you must be at least 40 years old to qualify"—before marching down to the post office to put up the poster for all to see. Unfortunately for us, my 10-year-old mother saw it first and when it came. We couldn't understand why she found our qualification so upsetting. Hurt and disappointed by this obstacle, we gave up our quest to serve altogether.

Now long past 40 and still quite able to rake my own leaves and carry my own groceries, I chuckle at the memory of our abandoned service project and wonder what my mother was really thinking when she made us remove our sign. Our intentions were commendable. It was our sincerely offered qualification that got us into trouble.

The issue of qualifications is very much at stake in Paul's letter to the Romans. Questions of what Gentiles and Jews need to do to qualify for membership in the Christian community prompt Paul's proclamation that justification is by grace through faith alone. Neither Jew nor Gentile does anything to qualify for God's love and acceptance. Membership in the Christian community is open to everyone who trusts that in Jesus Christ, God has acted to reconcile all creation.

Far from being a qualification for faith, obedience is the faithful response of believers to God's gracious gift to them. To make his point as pointedly as possible, Paul turns in Romans 4 to the patriarch Abraham, reminding his readers that Abraham's trust ("faith") in God's unqualified love preceded and precipitated his obedience to God (his "faithfulness"). What was true for Abraham is true also for those who confess Jesus Christ as Lord, Jew and Gentile alike.

## TRUSTING THE CLAIM

Many of us know and treasure these words of Paul. They are at the heart of the Lutheran tradition. Yet, knowing the words is not the same as trusting that what they claim is true for us and calls for a response from us. The quest for qualifications can get in our way, much as it did for the early Christians to whom Paul wrote. When that happens, we create obstacles that hinder us from sensing and celebrating the fullness of God's great gift to us in Jesus Christ.

Frank was a diligent, dedicated member of my congregation. Always ready to volunteer for almost any project, he offered to give a Temple talk on stewardship. In that talk, Frank shared for the first time his concern that his adult children were straying from the church and his conviction that somehow their wandering was due to his own unworthiness. He acknowledged that he tithed and volunteered for all sorts of church activities as a way to pray them and himself into heaven.

Frank's words stunned me. He had always seemed so self-assured in his faith. But he wasn't. Too fearful to trust that God really had claimed him and his children and loved them without qualifications, he spent his life trying to qualify for a gift that had already been freely given. Frank's intentions were com-



mendable. It was the obstacle created by his sincerely offered qualification that cost him the joy of sensing and celebrating God's gracious gift to him. Inwardly he lived in fear rather than faith.

### *Faith and obedience, justification and justice— these go hand in hand.*

While Frank made obedience a pre-qualification for faith, Rachel qualified her faith in a way that disqualified any connection to obedience. In our congregation, confirmation students were expected to exercise the obedience of faith by participating in service projects and attending parent/student sessions focusing on faithful responses to current social issues (such as drug use, world hunger, sexuality). This expectation made Rachel irate. Rallying other parents to her position, she protested vigorously to the parish education committee that such expectations overstepped the church's role in believers' lives.

For Rachel, faith is a private, internal relationship with Jesus. Connecting faith to expectations of service (that is, the obedience of faith) creates an obstacle to the personal, spiritual relationship Jesus wants to have with each believer. Rachel's protest to the parish education committee had the salutary

effect of prompting the committee to articulate more clearly the connection Paul makes between faith and obedience. Unhappy with that response, Rachel left the meeting angry and hurt.

The obstacle created by her qualification of faith cost Rachel dearly. Unable or unwilling to sense or celebrate obedience as the response of faith, she missed out on the joy and privilege of service freely given in Jesus' name.

#### THE TRANSFORMING GIFT

Throughout the letter to the Romans, Paul invites and challenges us to let go of self-imposed qualifications and to trust that what God says about us and our calling is unqualifiedly true. Based on his personal experience, Paul is convinced that Jesus' death and resurrection have changed everything. God's incredibly gracious gift of love in Jesus Christ has transforming power. Claimed by God and incorporated into the Christian community in baptism, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live as the beloved daughters and sons God declares us to be.

Trusting that our self-worth and value are a gift to be received rather than a goal to be achieved, we are free to respond by serving others in Jesus' name. Our service, the obedience of faith, takes us where Jesus went—into the messy, complex

ambiguities of life in our everyday world. Following the example of Jesus' faithfulness, we are privileged to exercise our faith by caring for the vulnerable and challenging systems that benefit the few at the expense of the many.

The mission statement of the school where I teach, Wartburg Theological Seminary, captures well the relationship between faith and obedience in the conviction "justification leads to justice." Trusting in God's unqualified gift to us ("faith"), we are free to respond in service and advocacy for individuals and communities without qualification ("obedience").

A woman I knew only as "Shirley the platinum blond cook" taught me much about how one person's obedience of faith can make a difference in another person's life. Shirley worked in the dining hall I frequented during my student years. Money was tight in those days. At the point when I could no longer afford to eat in the dining hall, I began a two-day self-devised "meal plan" that consisted of subsisting on ice cream cones and hamburgers purchased from the snack bar. At 50 cents for the whole meal (a sign of how long ago this was!), the price was right, and, while not nutritious, the meal was filling.

After several weeks on this regimen I was summoned to the dining hall by Shirley. There this cook, a



single parent living on the financial edge herself, quietly handed me a \$25 coupon book for meals in the dining hall. She kept track, and when she saw that the book was running out, she supplied me with another and another until the school year was over.

Shirley didn't have many material assets in this world, but what she had she joyfully shared. I will never forget her example of faith active in that generous act of the obedience of faith.

## THE WITNESS OF SERVICE

Throughout its history and that of its predecessor groups, Women of the ELCA has borne communal witness to the power of faith active in obedience. By accepting challenges of world hunger and poverty, building global relationships with women and communities in far-flung parts of our world, addressing issues of economic and social inequity—in many, many ways we have embodied the conviction that justification leads to justice.

Recalling the connection Paul makes between the gift of faith and the response of faithfulness, it is fitting to pause in thanksgiving for the women who have gone before us as witnesses of life lived in faith rather than fear, of obedience freely and joyfully rendered in response to God's gracious love for us and claim on us.

It is now autumn 2009, a year wracked by economic downturns, political wrangling and fears, difficult discussions within the church. Like the two fourth-grade girls seeking to serve the "elderly" so long ago, we want to be about the obedience to which God is calling us in this time and this place. Unlike the girls, we are not so naïve about the complexity of our call to service. While raking leaves and carrying groceries are important services for those who need them, we know that the obedience of faith challenges us to enter broader arenas as well.


To serve the elderly faithfully, for example, we need to investigate things like the complexity of health care needs and services, the reality of elder poverty as taxes rise and Social Security income shrinks, and the crime of elder abuse by caregivers unable or unwilling to provide the care actually needed.

In these difficult times, the obedience of faith leads us to address overarching systems as well as alleviating individual needs. Truly, justification leads to justice.

As we serve, questions of qualifications won't go away. Many of us continue to struggle with deep-seated fears that we are not worthy, that somehow our obedience must be a pre-qualification for God to really love us and claim us as God's own. Others of us are more comfortable qualifying faith as a per-

sonal cocoon shielding us from the world's messiness rather than sending us out to serve in it. Both sets of qualifications, sincerely offered though they may be, only create obstacles disconnecting us from the fullness of life God intends for us and for all creation.

Over against all the stumbling blocks we may put in the way, Paul's words are clear: The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ have changed everything. We are not who we were and we are not yet who we will be. God is at work in us and in our world, inviting us to trust and trustfully to act.

Faith and obedience, justification and justice—these go hand in hand. Listen again to Paul's proclamation: God has chosen you unqualifiedly through God's surpassingly gracious love for you. God has chosen you and commissions you as an ambassador to a world deeply in need of healing. Complex times call for confident commitment. Called and claimed as we are, it is time for us individually and corporately to act, in the obedience of faith. To what is God calling you? How will you respond? 

**The Rev. Gwen Saylor** is a professor of Hebrew Bible at Wartburg Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa. She is a member of the Class of '71 of the Lutheran Deaconess Community and an ELCA pastor. She co-wrote the *LWT* Bible study for 2008-2009, "The Hidden Hand of God."





## The Obedience of Faith

by Sarah Henrich

### BIBLE STUDY

#### Theme Verse

Romans 4:16a

"For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace."

#### Opening

Think of someone important to you who comes from a different faith tradition. Be prepared to pray for her or him, silently or aloud, during the opening prayer.

#### Prayer

Dear Lord,  
creator of all that is,  
we trust that you love and long for  
all your children to turn to you  
in love and faith.

We thank you for the witness  
of so many of your children, including . . .

Draw all of us close to you  
in that we may someday fully share  
the Spirit of our Lord Jesus  
and be blessed with peace and joy.

Make us witnesses of this hope.

Amen.

#### Hymn

"The God of Abraham Praise," *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 831, verses 1 and 3

#### Introduction

As the pastor says, "And so, on this Reformation Sunday . . ." the congregation begins to stir. Some open their hymnals. Others check their bulletins to see what comes next.

Often we can tell when a speaker is about to finish some presentation. Whether we're watching the news on television, attending a class, or even sitting in church, we almost always know when the speaker is about to wrap up. Often the hint is the repetition of a theme or a phrase from earlier in the presentation. We can recognize an ending coming in music too: when the musicians slow down for the last chords, or when all the orchestra joins in for a big crescendo of sound.

1. Think of one of your favorite pieces of music. How do you know when a piece of music, any piece of music, is about to end? How do we learn the signals that help us time a piece of music or a speech? How do you feel if the piece does not end when you thought it should?

#### Listening to Letters

People in Paul's day were skilled listeners. Most people were used to hearing their news and information in carefully constructed speeches. Few people could read or write, and there wasn't much available to read any



way. Because the culture was so thoroughly based on speech and hearing, knowing how to listen was even more important for everyone then than it is for us now. Even letters like Paul's would have been read aloud.

In order to be effective, speakers and letter writers had to help people listen and remember what they had heard. One common way to help was the repetition of an important word or phrase at key points. We can think about these repetitions as lights strung along the roof of a tunnel to help us get from one place to the next. We can also think of them as the two slices of bread around a sandwich filling, or two parentheses that enclose a phrase.

Paul uses an important repetition at the beginning and end of his letter to the Romans. In verse 1:5 and again in 16:26, he speaks of "the obedience of faith." In Romans 4, our chapter for this session, Paul speaks clearly about this obedience.

## **Abraham's Obedient Faith**

### **READ GENESIS 12:1-3 AND GENESIS 15:1-6.**

Who better to serve as an example of obedience and faith than Abraham? In Romans 4, Paul retells the Genesis story about Abraham as good news about God. Abraham is central to early Christian thinking for several reasons. First and foremost, Abraham was the first and most important of the Jewish patriarchs. God's promises of blessing were made to him first. In Paul's letters, as well as in the Gospels, we see that it was very important for early Christians to establish their connection to Abraham. As Abraham was called into a covenant with God to benefit all the families of the earth, so early Christians believed that they were called into such a covenant through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Another reason that Abraham was so important to early Christians (as well as to Jews) is that his relationship with God was based on faith or trust (these are the same word in Paul's Greek). Abraham was obedient

and left his homeland at God's command. He grew very old, much too old to have the large family and great number of descendants that God had promised; still he trusted that God would provide. Abraham was obedient and still loved Sarah as his wife and the future mother of a dynasty. Neither Sarah nor Abraham gave up in the face of great difficulty. Early Christians understood that they too were hoping against hope.

For many believers, including Paul, there was a third reason: As Genesis tells the story, Abraham first believed God and was reckoned righteous. He was understood to be in right relationship with God. Only afterward did God tell Abraham to circumcise himself and his household as a sign of that covenant relationship—a sign of covenant relationship that Jews have observed ever since. We'll see below that Paul thinks that this sequence—first faith and second circumcision—is important for Gentile believers.

Once again, dear friends, we need to listen to Paul attentively. Paul wants his hearers, including us, to see that God's story of the world isn't lots of little stories; it's one big story. Paul believes that God's call of Abraham and God's promises to Abraham are not undone by the resurrection of Jesus. Both Abraham and Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles, are part of God's ongoing story. Abraham and Jesus are models of obedient life that trusts God. (See "Freed to Obey" on p. 22.)

2. To see how important Abraham was for early Christians, find some of the other places in the New Testament where Abraham is mentioned. The entire list of Abraham's appearances is too long for this session, but notice that Abraham shows up in every kind of New Testament document. All of the evangelists mention Abraham (see, for example, Matthew 1:1-2, 17; 3:9; 8:11; 22:32; Mark 12:26; Luke 1:55, 73; 3:8, 34; 16:22, 23, 24, 25, 29, 30; 19:9; John 8:33, 37, 39, 40, 52, 53, 56, 57, 58) as do the apostle Paul (in addition to Romans, see Galatians 3:6, 7, 8, 9, 14, 16, 18, 29), and the writers of Hebrews (7:1, 2, 4-9; 11:8, 17), James (2:21-23),



1 Peter (3:6). Choose just a few passages to look at and then discuss why Abraham seems to be important in that particular context.

## What Did Paul Say Again?

The first chapters of the letter to the Romans are Paul's way of showing how Jews, who had the "oracles" (Scripture) of God and were to be God's "light to the world," had failed in their mission just as much as Gentiles had failed in theirs. Let's review the conclusions Paul comes to in these chapters.

Paul wrote that both Jews and Gentiles alike belong to the Judge of all the world and both would be judged according to each one's deeds (Romans 2:6, 9–10). God as judge shows no partiality (Romans 2:11; see also Galatians 2:6). With this emphasis, Paul shows that all human beings are united and equal because all are subject to the one creator God. He also makes clear that all human beings need God's help in receiving the salvation promised to Abraham.

The Jews had been entrusted with the "oracles of God," that is, with Scripture (Romans 3:2). Yet, according to Paul, "the righteousness of God" had been manifested "apart from law" (3:21). It is clear to Paul that "since God is one . . . he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith" (3:30). (The NRSV is a little awkward in 3:29–30; Paul is not saying that God is a Gentile but is echoing the essential Jewish prayer from Deuteronomy 6:4 to emphasize God's oneness—"Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.")

Even though God has shown God's own righteousness apart from the law, Paul insists that "we" (believers in Jesus the Messiah) do not overthrow the law, but instead uphold the law through faith. Don't you suppose that many of Paul's hearers must have been scratching their heads? They weren't so different from us! It is hard to understand how Paul can first contrast faith and the law and then affirm both. But that is

what he does. We may not be saved by law-keeping but the law is of great importance. Paul tries to help us get around this riddle through one of his favorite strategies—a rhetorical question.

## Rhetorical Questions Help Us Understand Paul

Rhetorical questions are questions that are asked with a definite answer in mind. Paul is a master at using them. Sometimes he lays out a question that he suspects his hearers might be asking. At other times he uses questions to put forward a wrong interpretation so that he can correct it. For example, Paul asks in Romans 6:1, "Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound?" Another example: "Did what is good, then bring death to me?" (7:13). To both these examples Paul answers, "By no means!"

In 4:1, Paul gives us a major question to begin this new chapter. You'll soon see the connection between 3:31 ("On the contrary, we uphold the law") and this question that follows right after it. Just hold on for a ride with lots of surprising twists and turns! We will get to Paul's destination.

The NRSV translates this question as "What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh?" Other translations phrase it differently: Clearly Paul's language is hard to put into English here. Many scholars favor this translation: "Shall we say then that we have found Abraham to be our ancestor according to the flesh?" Both Jewish and Gentile Christians may have hesitated to answer Paul's question. What could he mean by that?

"According to the flesh" can be translated as "humanly speaking." When Paul refers to *flesh* here and elsewhere in his letters, he is not writing primarily about our bodies. He is writing about all the ways of this world, the standards by which this world judges the desires, hopes, and dreams that this world inspires and rewards. Now surely our bodies are part of this world. Both our worldly lives and our spiritual lives are



ved within and by means of the same body. We have only one way to exist on earth. We participate in the life of the flesh (worldly standards and dreams) in our bodies. We live by means of the Spirit in our bodies.

Many have thought that Paul was against the body, but he was not. In fact, he longs for the full redemption of our bodies along with the rest of God's creation. Paul, like other Jews, believed that God had created all things good. But Paul knew about enslavement to the ways of the world and longed for life in God's realm, a way of being human in line with all that God had created us to be. (See "Miraculous and One" on p. 12.)

So when Paul asks the question about Abraham as our ancestor according to the flesh, Paul has in mind the answer "no." Abraham is our ancestor according to Abraham's faithfulness. That is the only way Abraham

can be ancestor to both Jew and Gentile, circumcised and uncircumcised. Paul takes the Jewish esteem of Abraham as ancestor and extends Abraham's ancestral connection also to Gentiles. Abraham is first and foremost, Paul argues, the ancestor of all who trust in God.

3. Read Romans 1:3–4. Paul describes Jesus in two contrasting ways: (1) Jesus as "descended from David according to the flesh" and (2) Jesus "declared to be Son of God" "according to the spirit of holiness." What do you think Paul might be trying to say with these two contrasting statements? Why do you think Paul puts this contrast at the very beginning of the letter? Keep in mind that Paul's audience had not heard the whole letter when they hear these words. Could this be a kind of teaser?

#### IF TIME PERMITS ACCORDING TO THE WHAT?

There are three Greek words used by Paul to talk about humans and their physical and spiritual complexity: *soma*, *sarx*, and *psyche*. *Soma* is traditionally translated "body." *Sarx* is most often translated as "flesh," and *psyche* can be translated as "soul," "heart," "spirit," or something that suggests the internal life. The following is a collection of verses in which each term appears. Read these verses and see if you can discern any distinctions among these words. Can you see any overlaps? You can look up these three terms in a Bible dictionary to gain a better understanding.

<i>Soma</i>	<i>Sarx</i>	<i>Psyche</i>
Romans 8:10, 11, 13	Romans 8:4–9, 12–13	Romans 2:9
Romans 12:1, 4–5	Romans 9:3, 5, 8	Romans 11:3
1 Corinthians 6:13, 15, 16–20	1 Corinthians 1:26, 29	1 Corinthians 15:45
1 Corinthians 12:12–27	1 Corinthians 15:39, 50	2 Corinthians 1:23
Galatians 6:17	Galatians 2:20 Galatians 5:16–17 Galatians 5:24	No uses in Galatians
Philippians 1:20; 3:21	Philippians 1:22, 24; Philippians 3:3–4	Philippians 1:27; Philippians 2:30



## Jesus and Abraham

In Romans 4:9 Paul clearly states, “Faith [or faithfulness] was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness.” For Paul, it was of the utmost importance that Abraham was made right with God *before* Abraham circumcised the men and boys of his household. Notice the order here:

- (1) Genesis 15:6: God reckons righteousness to Abraham (that is, God sets Abraham in right relationship with God).
- (2) Genesis 17:8–8: God promises blessing to Abraham and his offspring (among whom Paul believes to be Jesus Christ).
- (3) Genesis 17:23–27: God commands Abraham to circumcise himself and the men and boys of his household.

Because Abraham responded to God’s call with faithful obedience that was counted as righteousness, Paul sees that circumcision was not a requirement for being made right with God. Instead, faithfulness was Abraham’s response to God’s call and promise. Scripture as Paul reads it shows that all people can be children of Abraham according to their own faithful response to God. The covenant between God and Abraham did not take shape according to the flesh, but based on God’s gracious promise and Abraham’s faithful hearing. (See “To Obey and to Love” on p. 6.)

This basic insight allows Paul to claim Abraham as “our” ancestor for both his Gentile and Jewish hearers. Paul sees Jesus as the single particular “seed of Abraham” to whom blessings were promised. For Paul, Scripture was proven true when God bestowed the promised blessing (resurrection life) on the faithful and obedient Jesus at his resurrection. The faithful and obedient Abraham had been set in right relationship with God (reckoned righteous). The faithful and obedient Jesus was also revealed as righteous at his resurrection.

**READ GALATIANS 3:14–18.** In this letter Paul develops his argument about the connection of Abraham and Christ with God in detail. *Seed* (also translated as *offspring* in the NRSV) is a collective noun in Hebrew and Greek, as it is in English. Like the words *herd*, *flock*, or *people*, collective nouns use a singular form to describe a group made up of many individuals. Paul is technically correct that *seed* is singular, but it is clear that it is used collectively in Genesis to describe Abraham’s descendents.

4. How important do you think it is that we agree with Paul’s way of reading Scripture? Are we able to disagree with his methods and still honor his conclusions? Can we do that with those who read the Bible differently than we do in our own time?

We can see other ways in which Jesus and Abraham are alike in Romans 4. We hear Paul’s claim that Abraham, like Jesus (and like us), received God’s promises and trusted that God would keep those promises. Why is that important? Because for Abraham (like Jesus, and often like us), it did not look as if God would keep the promises. Abraham in his and Sarah’s old age could no longer have any realistic (according to the flesh!) expectation of a child. Jesus hanging on the cross knows he will not have life according to the flesh much longer. Yet we see that both men hoped against hope. And we see that for both Abraham and Jesus, the God they trusted and obeyed did indeed bring into existence that which did not exist (Romans 4:17). Abraham had a child, Isaac, although his body and Sarah’s were too old to bring forth new life. For Jesus, new life came through a body fully given over to death.

Paul, good pastor that he is, does not stop with historical references. It is God’s gift both to the Roman church and still to us (4:24) that Abraham is our ancestor according to the Spirit that comes from God and engenders faith. The Judge of all the world has made us right

ous by raising Jesus from the dead and bestowing  
n him and us as we share in his faithfulness, a right  
relationship with God's very self, God's true self, the  
one who longed for true life for all people from the  
beginning.

Paul refers to obedience in other parts of his letter.  
The word can mean many things. Many times *obey*  
means to go about your life trusting that God will bring  
to pass what God has promised. For both Abraham  
and Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist (Luke  
23–25, 63–80), to obey God meant to continue to  
seek to have a child even though they were very old.

5. In Scripture, *believe* and *obey* are often in parallel, meaning  
the same or very similar things. See Romans 10:16 and Deu-  
teronomy 6:3–4 for examples. How do you “obey” God? How  
is your obedience connected with hearing God's word?

#### IF TIME PERMITS YOUR OWN LETTER

Here's a chance to pay as close attention to  
your own theology as we've been paying to  
Paul's. Write or outline a letter to someone  
you don't know very well (you don't have  
to send this if you don't want to). It could  
be a distant relative, an elected official, a  
teacher you remember, a former pastor—  
your choice. In your letter, write about what  
you believe about God's relationship to  
all creatures, including human beings, and  
creation itself. Keep it brief. Tell the truth  
as you best understand it. When you've  
finished, look at your letter or ask someone  
else to do so and note what themes and  
words seem important to you. Does your  
letter say what you want it to say? What do  
you learn about yourself from it?

## Closing

### Hymn

“The God of Abraham Praise,” *Evangelical Lutheran  
Worship* 831, verse 4

### Prayer

You may share this prayer for Commemoration of  
Saints (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 59), or pray in  
your own words:

Lord God, you have surrounded us with so great  
a cloud of witnesses. Grant that we encouraged by  
the example of your servants Abraham and Paul may  
persevere in the course that is set before us and, at the  
last, share in your eternal joy with all the saints in light,  
through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

### Looking Ahead

In Romans 5, Paul explains why having been put right  
with God by Jesus' faithfulness changes our lives for-  
ever. If you have a chance to read Romans 5 before  
coming to Bible study, please do so. It is not long, but  
it is a densely packed chapter that deals with important  
realities for Christians. If you can read it more than  
once, so much the better. You may want to jot down  
your questions to bring along to the next study. 🌿

**The Rev. Sarah Henrich** is professor of New Testament at Luther  
Seminary, St. Paul, Minn.

*Watch Sarah Henrich  
discuss this Bible study  
on video.*

Go to [www.lutheranwomantoday.org](http://www.lutheranwomantoday.org).





HEALTH WISE

## Prescription Peril

by Molly M. Ginty

### A 54-year-old woman

took a heart drug that was not approved for her condition—and developed such severe lung problems that she can now only breathe with an oxygen tank.

A 60-year-old health care worker used a high blood pressure drug that slowed her pulse to half its normal, healthy rate.

A 79-year-old grandmother suddenly became so confused that she couldn't finish her sentences. The cause proved not to be aging, but a tranquilizer that triggered dementia in so many patients that it had to be taken off the market.

Five years ago this month, the painkiller Vioxx was pulled from pharmacy shelves because studies revealed that it doubled the risk of heart attacks and strokes in the 20 million Americans who were taking it. But despite safety scandals surrounding Vioxx and other big-name drugs—and despite measures meant to make medications safer—problems persist that could put you and your family in prescription peril.

“When the Food and Drug Administration approves a drug, it means that in most cases, the drug’s benefits outweigh its risks,” says Sheila Weiss Smith, Ph.D., director of the Center for Drug Safety at the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy in Baltimore. “But this is by no means a guarantee that any drug is 100 percent safe.”

Every year, Americans experience more than 2 million adverse drug reactions. From the diabetes medication Avandia (linked to heart problems) to the

anti-psychotic Zyprexa (tied to increased diabetes risk), many common drugs have stirred controversy. Adverse events typically strike women (who take more prescription drugs than men) and people over age 65 (who take an average of six medications per day). But studies show that 80 percent of all drug patients have problems with their prescriptions, 50 percent take doses that are too high or low, and 44 percent take drugs in combinations that can be harmful.

When drug use goes awry, side effects can include heart problems, ulcers, memory loss—even paralysis. Take any medication in the wrong amount, at the wrong time, or in combination with other drugs that don't mix well with it, and short-term discomfort—or long-term debility—can result.

Problems associated with prescription drugs have tripled since 1998, according to a study in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*. “Better science means drugs are getting more potent,” says study author Curt D. Furberg, M.D., Ph.D., a professor of public health at Wake Forest University School of Medicine. “And because of this increased potency, we also have an increase in adverse events.”

Experts say the rapid pace of health care in the United States is only fueling the problem. Research shows that the average doctor's visit lasts just 15 minutes—barely enough time to conduct a physical exam, much less explain prescribed medications. Physicians neglect to mention drugs' side effects two-thirds of the time.

This ongoing column is part of the Women of the ELCA health initiative, Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls. Visit [www.womenoftheelca.org](http://www.womenoftheelca.org) for more information.

Attempts at government oversight have also fallen short. In 1992, a response to complaints that life-saving drugs such as HIV medications were mired in the approval process, authorities took steps that cut the average FDA drug approval time in half. This saved up to 310,000 years of life for patients.

But priority-reviewed drugs, according to Harvard studies, became three to five times more likely to be withdrawn for safety reasons. Fast-tracked drugs that had to be banned include the painkillers Vioxx and Celebrex, the diabetes drug Rezulin, and the cholesterol-buster Baycol.

The good news? Newer changes in oversight show more promise. In 2007, after a flurry of drug safety scandals, the FDA improved its database so people could report adverse events online instead of filling out paperwork. It revamped its Web site to alert the public about potential problems in real time instead of after the fact. Now the agency is ramping up research to determine whether a drug is toxic before a patient ever takes it.

Even better news? You can dramatically reduce your risk of adverse drug events by taking a few simple steps:

**ASK** your doctor the questions he or she may not take time to raise. What is your condition? What are your treatment options? What are

these options' risks and benefits? Why should you use one particular drug rather than other similar drugs on the market?

**MENTION** other medications you're taking before your doctor prescribes a new one. Include over-the-counter remedies and supplements such as allergy pills, vitamins, and herbs, which can affect how your body processes prescription drugs.

**OPT** for older medications if your condition doesn't require cutting-edge drugs—and if your doctor agrees that tried-and-true medications are safe options for you.

**LEARN** everything you can about the drugs you're taking. Read patient information leaflets and search health Web sites for more info.

**TAKE** the lowest dose possible of any given drug, which lets you watch for side effects and slowly increase the dosage to achieve desired results.

**FIND** out if you're taking a drug "off-label" for a purpose that has been scientifically studied, but is not yet FDA-approved. This practice is common—especially with cardiac and anticonvulsant drugs. But it may put you at increased risk for adverse effects.



**RELY** on the same pharmacist and ask him or her to help explain how prescriptions work.

**DON'T** discount side effects if you think you're experiencing them. "Pick up the phone and call your doctor—or head to the emergency room right away," advises Weiss Smith. 🌿

**Molly M. Ginty** lives in New York. Her work has appeared in *Ms.*, *Marie Claire*, *Redbook*, and *Women's eNews*.

**For more information:**

Public Citizen  
[www.worstpills.org](http://www.worstpills.org)

FDA Center for Drug Evaluation and Research  
[www.fda.gov/cder](http://www.fda.gov/cder)



# Engaging in Ministry

Participants of Women of the ELCA love to help others in ways they know best. Hundreds of groups make quilts that they pass on to Lutheran World Relief (LWR), to those in need in their communities, and to college freshmen leaving the comforts of home.

They assemble health kits, school kits, and food buckets. They knit hats, make home-cooked dinners, hold elaborate fundraisers for the church, and sew anniversary quilts to display at church. And they meet for Bible study.

We know all this because they send us their photos. And we want to share them with you. Usually we run one photo of a group engaged in ministry on page 43, above the Reader Services information. But we have so many pictures that we decided to dedicate a few pages to the photos you've sent us.

## Women of the ELCA

### PURPOSE STATEMENT

As a community of women created in the image of God, called to discipleship in Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to grow in faith, affirm our gifts, support one another in our callings, engage in ministry and action, and promote healing and wholeness in the church, the society, and the world.



*The Dorcas Circle (and guests) of St. John's Lutheran Church, Reedsburg, Wis., held their Bible study last summer on Lake Redstone pontoon boat. From left: Delores Ellington, Lohr, Chris McGee, Shirley West, CJ Neumann, Alice Van de Water, Jean MacFarlane, Karen Jacobson, Verill Johnson, Shirley Buss and Sue Peterson.*



*Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Hartsville, S.C. Every year, the Women of the ELCA group collects gifts for the Angel Tree to help needy families. Last year, they collected 67 bags of books, crayons, coloring books, toys, stuffed animals, and more to give to foster children in Darlington County.*





Christ Lutheran Church, Spring Grove, Pa.  
The Stitch & Gab quilting group from Christ  
(Roth's) Lutheran Church made its 5,000th  
quilt recently. They give the quilts to LWR,  
local shelters, and outreach charities.



St. John Lutheran Church, Dimock, S.D.  
"The ladies wrapped their love in quilts."

The quilting group at St. John  
challenged itself to make 125 quilts for  
the church's 125th anniversary in 2008  
(even though they had made only 52  
quilts in 2007). They met and sur-  
passed their goal. The quilts went to  
LWR and local charities. The ladies  
wrapped their love in quilts to be used  
on beds, for room dividers, for shelter  
from the sun, for warmth from the  
cold, for protection from insects, or  
for carrying precious possessions  
on someone's back.



Every Monday, members of St. Peter's Lutheran  
Church in Marble Falls, Texas, along with a  
few friends, come together for a weekly  
"Parents Morning Out" Bible study. In addition  
to receiving Lutheran Woman Today from the  
church, the group gets together for summer  
Bible study with Women of the ELCA groups.  
-Stephanie Everett, youth and family ministry  
coordinator, St. Peter's





Lolita Lukach (right) made a memory quilt to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, Wis., in 2008. "I've been attending this church for about the past 50 years—since

I was 18. The church has meant a great deal to my family and to me over the years." The quilt has 76 squares, representing the church's history, its pastors, logos, music, various church groups, special memories, and such celebrations as baptisms, confir-

mations, and weddings. About half of the squares were made by fellow members, the rest by Lolita. It took almost a year to complete the quilt, which now hangs in the narthex of the church.



Members of Rachel Circle at Christ Lutheran Church in Glencoe, Minn., meet monthly in each other's homes to enjoy coffee, treats, and to

Bible study from Lutheran Woman Today.

Pictured are: front row, from left: Judy La sen, Barb Rausenbe, Chris Davis, Jan Pet, Karen Wendlandt; back row: Sandy Tibbin, Kathy Olson, Mar, Miller, Jeanne Pay, Linda Roisum, M, Resch, Jan Gies.



Bethel Lutheran Church, Joplin, Mont.

"We're the only church in Joplin. We make it onto some maps, and some maps we don't. The post office just gave us an address this year."—Arlene Anderson

Seven or eight women go to the church every Tuesday to assemble quilts that some of the women have worked on "night and day at home in preparation for the work day." The Bethel Quilters have given quilts to homes for abused spouses, the rescue mission, children's homes, cancer patients, veteran's homes, Lutheran Social Services, and individuals in need of blankets. The group has participated in "Make a Difference Day" in October for 13 consecutive years.



"Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life" (Proverbs 16:31). The Women of the ELCA group at Faith Lutheran Church in Valders, Wis., hosted its annual Fall Fling Event last October, a special day set aside for members age 80-plus and their guests. From left: Janet Reinertson, Cheryl Domrath, Veryl Hein, Ruth Torrison, Beverly Hildebrandt, Mary Haupt.



Members of the Mary-Rebecca study group at Lutheran Memorial Church in Pierre, S.D., enjoy their Lutheran Woman Today Bible study at the home of Mabel Kusler. From left: Florence Halligan, Alma Flanigan, and Margaret Kindt.



Our Savior Lutheran Church, Wayne, Neb. The "sewing women" of Our Savior meet monthly to "engage in ministry and action to promote healing and wholeness in the church, the society and the world by providing quilts and lap robes to those in need," said Phyllis Rahn. They raised nearly \$4,000 for Nebraska Lutheran Outdoor Ministries. They gave quilts and lap robes to area fire victims, a wilderness camp in Minnesota, a rescue mission, and the ELCA Youth Gathering in New Orleans. They also sent sewing kits, quilts, health kits, and money to LWR.



## SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

by Terri Lackey

# CALLED TO BE A PEACEMAKER

At this writing, Crystal Corman (shown right) has 454 Facebook friends. That's a lot. And it seems to be a good barometer of her character. Winner of a 2009 Cronk Scholarship from Women of the ELCA, Corman is quite the achiever.

She's going to Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., for a master's degree in theological studies. At the same time, Corman is attending graduate school for a master's in international peace and conflict resolution at American University, in Washington, D.C. At least they are on adjacent campuses.

"As a result of God's abundant love, I feel a deep desire to serve others," Corman wrote to Women of the ELCA in her scholarship application. "In discerning my vocation, I feel called to be a peacemaker. I feel that religious people have a unique position in community to build and sustain peace."

Corman, a member of Luther Place Memorial Church in Wash-

ington, D.C., says she hopes to work for peace around the world on behalf of all God's creation, not just Lutherans or even Americans. The 29-year-old has done so much already; I was exhausted after reading her application.

When we e-mailed each other about this article, she was in Malaysia. "At the moment, I am in Malaysia interning for a women's NGO (non-governmental organization), the All Women's Action Society." The organization has been working since 1985 to improve the lives of women in Malaysia by creating a "just and equitable society where women are treated with respect."

While in college at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, she was the young woman's representative for the Nebraska Synodical Women's Organization (NSWO) of the ELCA. In that capacity, she attended board meetings, helped plan the synod gathering, photographed the gathering, and wrote articles for the NSWO newsletter. She also



organized campus ministry activities for women and represented the NSWO on a companion synod trip to Tanzania.

In high school, she served as treasurer for the Lutheran Youth Organization of Nebraska. And in college at Lincoln, she was active in campus ministry activities like choir, small group Bible study, Lutheranism classes, and the banner committee. For two summers, Corman was a counselor for the Nebraska synod's outdoor ministry. After earning her bachelor's degree, she became involved in Young Adult

Global Mission, attending two Global Mission events. In 2005, she was Nebraska's representative to the Young Adult Convocation held during Churchwide Assembly, and later served on the Nebraska Synod's strategic plan implementation team.

And I've skipped some stuff.


Eric Bostrom, campus pastor at the University of Nebraska, offered three words to describe Crystal: authentic, global, quality."

"The Lutheran Center [at the university] does not have a unit of the Women of the ELCA," Bostrom wrote, "but Crystal would actively

connect our students with local congregational Women of the ELCA groups for quilting projects, banner projects, service projects, and meals. An investment in Crystal is an investment in Women of the ELCA."

Thanks to your gifts, Women of the ELCA awarded 25 women a total of \$22,000 through six scholarship categories, according to Emily Hansen, director for stewardship, Women of the ELCA. Women selected for scholarships are age 21 or over and represent every region in the ELCA.

Women of the ELCA scholarships support a diverse group of

women, including second-career students, seminarians, female college faculty, and professional women on the road to career advancement. Various fields of study are represented, such as lay ministry, ordination, child development, social work, health sciences, and teaching. Some scholarship recipients are undergraduates; others are in their final year of seminary. Some graduated high school 10 or more years ago and are just now beginning their higher education. To learn more, go to [www.womenoftheelca.org](http://www.womenoftheelca.org). 

**Terri Lackey** is managing editor, *Lutheran Woman Today*.

## 2009-2010 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS BY FUND AND SYNODICAL REGION

**Ordained Ministry Scholarship supported by the Chilstrom Fund**  
Assists women who are second-career students at ELCA seminaries preparing for ordained ministry in ELCA congregations

► Theresa Ann Langdon, 8F  
Mifflingburg, Pa.  
Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, Pa.  
Ordination process

► Renee (Margaret) Lier, 2E  
Evergreen, Colo.  
Luther Seminary,  
St. Paul, Minn.  
Ordination process

**Administrative Leadership Scholarship supported by the Arne Fund**  
Provides assistance to women interested in reaching the top of their field as an administrator

► Margo L. Swan, 5K  
Whitewater, Wis.  
Concordia University  
Mequon, Wis.  
M.A. Student Personnel  
Administration

**Laywomen Opportunity Scholarship supported by the Drinkhall Franke/Seeley Knudstrup Scholarship Fund.**  
Assists mature ELCA laywomen preparing for an occupation in

Christian service through a graduate course of study

► Donna L. Randolph, 3C  
Sioux Falls, S.D.  
Sioux Falls Seminary  
Associate in Ministry

**Laywomen Opportunity Scholarship supported by the Amelia Kemp Fund**  
Assists mature ELCA women of color in undergraduate, graduate, professional, or vocational courses of study

► Amy Broussard-Dawson, 2B  
Carson, Calif.  
California Institute of Technology  
Pasadena, Calif.  
Project Management Certificate



► Criscelda P. Mortimore, 6B  
Kalamazoo, Mich.  
Western Michigan University  
Kalamazoo, Mich.  
B.A., Spanish

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**Laywomen Opportunity Scholarship**

supported by Belmer Fund and Flora  
Prince Memorial Fund

Assists women studying for ELCA  
service abroad

► Malisha Brown, 9D  
Douglasville, Ga.  
West Central Technical College  
Waco, Ga.  
Associate in Nursing

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## RACE NOTES

# The Pull of the Spirit

Linda Post Bushkofsky



## In June I spoke with

Lila, age 100. She put down her crochet project and leaned in to tell me, “I’m jealous of you. You get to travel around the country and meet all the women of this church.”

Lila is right. This year I’ve been meeting more Lutheran women than ever before. My trips are full of stories of women engaged in amazing ministries, caring for an expanding understanding of neighbor.

And I’ve noticed that the strongest and most vibrant units I’ve encountered are intergenerational groups who are open to the pull of the Holy Spirit. Let me share an example.

The day Lila offered me her insights, I was visiting with women at Bethlehem Lutheran in Lansing, Mich. The youngest in the group was 8 months old. There were five mother-daughter duos among the 30 or so present, including Lila and her daughter. The group is known as FAB (Fiber Artists of Bethlehem). FAB gathers monthly around yarn; they knit and crochet service projects, like hats for the homeless or sweaters for Lutheran World Relief layette kits.

Women have been active at Bethlehem over many decades, but this particular group formed last summer after members of FAB had been inspired at the Triennial Gathering in Salt Lake City. They heard Betty Christiansen, author of *Knitting for Peace*, speak about how individuals can take small steps to make the world a better place. They came home, started up a group, and this

new ministry is flourishing under the umbrella of Women of the ELCA. FAB is an intergenerational group that is open to the pull of the Holy Spirit.

While I’ve been out making these congregational visits, some letters have been arriving at my desk from units that are disbanding. “Our unit has had difficulties for the past decade or more in getting leadership and participation,” they write. “We have an older group of women who have ‘been there and done that’ and are no longer able to carry the burden.” “It is sad to do this but we only have three or four ladies who come to our monthly meetings.” Most of these letters claim that younger women are “unable to commit the time it takes to actively participate.”

I celebrate with these women what has been: their years of dedicated service, study, and fellowship. At the same time, I mourn what could have been. Too often we have been mired in a “we’ve always done it that way” mentality and we haven’t been willing to see where the Holy Spirit is pulling us.

Are the younger women really too busy? I doubt it. They’re probably not interested in business meetings, but younger women, no matter how busy, still want to gather with other women, talk about their faith, share experiences, and engage in service.

Take a page from the women at Bethlehem Lutheran. Be open to the pull of the Holy Spirit. 🌿

**Linda Post Bushkofsky** is executive director, Women of the ELCA.





AMEN!

## Turn Me to Obedience

by Catherine Malotky

**To you, my Creator, I** give thanks and praise. If I sit quietly, if I still my racing mind, and set aside my to-do list, if I stop and breathe, I can center and turn to you.

When I am so centered, I am not outside of myself, but deep within. I can hear my breathing, in and out. I can feel my belly push against the fabric that surrounds it. I can hear my heart beat, sure and steady, the sound of my internal universe. My stomach may speak, or a swallow may click my inner ears. I can hear my breathing, in and out.

I am, then, a body, alive with all my quirks and blessings. No other has hair just like mine. No other has feet shaped just so, or a belly stretched exactly as mine is from carrying babies inside. No other has my collection of scars, evidence of childhood escapades or even adult mishaps.

And those around me? Just as wonderful. Just as unique. My father's pitching arm is now too stiff to lift for hugging. Years later, his sore shoulder bears testimony to those long-ago fast balls. My mother's back, curving more every year, is settling her, so at last she is shorter than I.

My daughter's knee is decorated with the scar that marks two falls onto rocks as we made our way down a mountain. My other daughter's wrist recalls the surgery that repaired a broomball injury.

For all of us, our skin and bones tell the story of our lives. Our muscles and tendons bear memories of days and even years past.

Our bodies, though we may wish it otherwise, are who we are.

What does it mean to be so blessed? Have we honored the blessing that is the body we have? Have we responded to this wonder with the grace of obedience, tending and nurturing our bodies as God's gift and our close companion?

For many of us, the answer is no. For many of us, the messages that surround us have duped us into thinking of our bodies as deficient.

For some of us, our bodies have challenged us with health problems and pain that make it harder and harder to live with joy.

Yet, God, you chose to take on a body in Jesus. You chose flesh so that you might be as close as possible to us. This must be a sign of truth, of your affirmation of our skin and bones.

Turn me to obedience, God. My body, broken or whole, creaking or sound, young or aging, is your gift to me. Turn me to obedience, so that I might cherish this flesh even as I cherish the flesh of others.

Call me to nurture, protection, and even joy in my body. Turn me to obedience, that my faith might be counted as righteousness. The gift is there. You have given it without my request or deserving. You have loved me and this body all along. May my honor of it be my thanks to you. Amen. 🌿

**The Rev. Catherine Malotky** serves the ELCA Board of Pensions as retirement planning manager. An ordained pastor, she has also been a editor, teacher, parish pastor, and retreat leader.



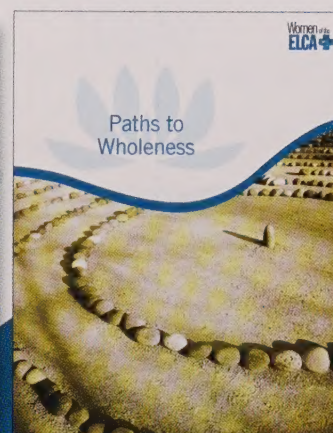
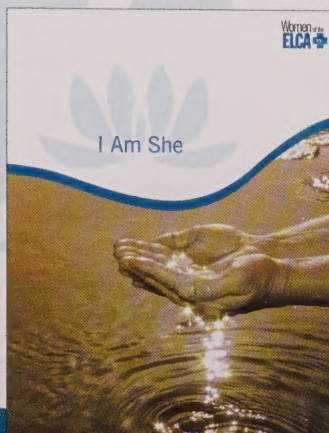
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